

Short communications

Black-rumped Buttonquail *Turnix hottentota* in Serengeti National Park, Tanzania

On 16 January 2003 we were exploring some loop roads in the Simba Kopjes area of Serengeti National Park. There had clearly been good rain as the entire area was very green with much fresh grass growth measuring between 30–40 cm and even longer in places. On reaching a very shallow drainage line across the plains, the tracks became muddy and scattered with puddles. As it became increasingly wet the grasses were replaced by tall, luxuriant sedges.

It was on the edge of this wet area that we first flushed a buttonquail. It came from near the edge of the track in a stretch where the ground was very moist, but with little standing water. The surroundings were open with lush, green grass about 30 cm tall. The bird was immediately identified as Black-rumped, a species we know very well from Zambia. In our experience, the prominence of the dark rump is usually exaggerated in field guide illustrations, but on this individual it was surprisingly conspicuous. We also noted the rather simple and dark coloration of the upperparts with uniform rufous-brown mantle, scapulars and upperwing coverts and dark brown remiges as opposed the rather variegated and generally paler pattern typical of Common Buttonquail *Turnix sylvatica* (Leonard 1997). This wing pattern is easiest to see as the bird banks and briefly glides prior to landing and at this point we also noted the orange wash on the side of the face and neck.

Fortunately, the bird had not flown far and we were able to flush it a second time to confirm our observations. At this point we were not aware that the record was unusual as it seemed to be a perfect location for the species. In Zambia birds are typically in very open grassland with no trees or shrubs. Birds are characteristic of wetter areas or at least areas that are liable to regular water-logging (Beel 1997, Benson *et al.* 1971). An analysis of Zambian records suggests that birds are migratory (Leonard 1999), a theory supported by the species' tendency to fly into lights at night (Benson *et al.* 1971). It therefore seems probable that the bird in the Serengeti would have arrived after heavy rain produced suitable conditions. Judging by the large areas of suitable habitat, it also seems possible that the species may prove to be more regular in the area once explored more thoroughly.

References

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Black-rumped Buttonquail is known from Uganda and Kenya but there appears to be only one previous record in Tanzania, mentioned in Britton (1980), from Ugano in Songea. (N. Baker *in litt.* to editor).

Britton, P. L. (ed) 1980. *Birds of East Africa*. Nairobi: East Africa Natural History Society.

Breeding of Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* in Mafia Island Marine Park, Tanzania

The Mafia Island Marine Park is best known for its underwater biodiversity (MIMP 2000) but it also has ornithological value. The Kinasi pass is the eastward outflow into the Indian Ocean of the channel of Chole Bay and is characterised by a series of small vegetated fossil coral islands and some smaller mushroom-shaped limestone crags without any vegetation, located at approximately 39°48'40"E, 07°56'40"S. On 2 August 2003 groups of relatively small terns were observed from a boat, feeding in and beyond the surf zone at the reef edge in this area. They were identified as Roseate Terns *Sterna dougallii* on the basis of their bright, white plumage, long tail streamers, complete black caps, bright red legs and a variable amount of deep red on the bill, with some bills entirely deep red, others having blackish tips. Good views were obtained of birds flying towards two of the islands and one of the limestone crags in the area, with some carrying small fish. At all three sites there was a continuous presence of calling and hovering terns. We suspect that this behaviour is indicative of breeding and that as many as 150 pairs may have been breeding in the area.

The two islands used by the terns have an outer, unvegetated, coral-rag zone, possibly caused by salty spray, and it was over this that most of the activity was observed. Though small fish were clearly being carried into these areas, it was impossible to confirm if there were actually young present. The surface of the limestone rocks was high relative to sea-level and was heavily eroded with deep depressions so that young birds could easily have been hidden from sight.

Roseate Tern used to be classified as globally near-threatened (IUCN 2000) but this category is no longer recognised by BirdLife International and, therefore, the species does not figure in more recent versions of the